

# Business English and Business Correspondence: How to Structure an English Business Letter

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**Abstract:** *This paper argues about Business English and Business Correspondence in general and Business Letter in particular. Business English is English language especially related to international trade. It is a part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and can be considered a specialism within English language learning and teaching; for example, the teachers' organization called International Association of Teachers of English as Foreign Languages (IATEFL) has a special interest group called Business English Special Interest Group (BESIG). (Conference Abstract on English for Specific Purposes, Serbia, 2013). Many non-native English speakers study the subject with the goal of doing business with English-speaking countries, or with companies located outside the Anglo sphere but which nonetheless use English as a shared language or lingua franca. Therefore, some grammatical errors should be ignored by non-native English speakers (Braj Kachru, 1985). Much of the English communication that takes place within business circles all over the world occurs between non-native speakers. In cases such as these, the object of the exercise is efficient and effective communication. (Sandra Lee McKay, 2002). Business English is the type of English used in business contexts, such as international trade, commerce, finance, insurance, banking, and many office settings. It entails expectations of clarity, particular vocabulary, and grammatical structures. (Katie Almeida Spencer, Instructional Solutions). For others it refers to the communication skills used in the workplace, and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, small talk, socializing, correspondence, report writing, and so on. In both of these cases it can be taught to native speakers of English, for example, high school students preparing to enter the job market. It can also be a form of international English. It is possible to study Business English at college and university; institutes around the world have on offer courses (modules) in B.E., which can even lead to a degree in the subject. (Jones, Leo & Richard Alexander, 2010). This research paper highlights and argues about Business English and Business Correspondence and it gives help to English learners to polish their skills and sub-skills. Business correspondence is the communication or exchange of information in a written format for the process of business activities. Business correspondence can take place between organizations, within organizations or between the customers and the organization. The correspondence is generally of widely accepted formats that are followed universally. This paper highlights these points of Business Correspondence. (E. B. Nikolaenko, 2008). This paper highlights on the writing skill for writing a business letters according to British and American style or format.*

**Keywords:** Business English, Business Correspondence, Business Letters

## 1. Introduction

Business correspondence is the communication or exchange of information in a written format for the process of business activities. Business correspondence can take place between organizations, within organizations or between the customers and the organization. The correspondence is generally of widely accepted formats that are followed universally. (Merriam & Webster, 1993). The main points in Business correspondence is maintaining a proper relationship, serves as evidence, create and maintain goodwill, inexpensive and convenient, formal communication and independent of interpersonal skills.

## 2. Types of Business Correspondence

Types of Business Correspondence are Business letters, emails and memorandum.

### 1) Business letters

Business letters are the most formal method of communication following specific formats. They are addressed to a particular person or organization. A good business letter follows the seven C's of communication. The different types of business letters used based on their context are as follows,

- a) Letters of inquiry
- b) Letters of claim/complaints

- c) Letters of application
- d) Letters of approval/dismissal
- e) Letters of recommendations
- f) Letters of promise.

Official letters can be handwritten or printed. Modernisation has led to the usage of new means of business correspondence such as E-mail and Fax. (McLean, Scott, 2010).

### 2) Email

Email is the latest formal method of business communication. It is the most widely used method of written communication usually done in a conversational style. It is used when there is a need to communicate to large audience in an organization.

### 3) Memorandum

Memorandum is a document used for internal communication within an organization. Memos may be drafted by management and addressed to other employees, and it is sent with the money draft. Memos are sent to several people in a team when important business matters need to be updated to them or to a single person to have a written record of the information.

**1.2 How to Structure an English Business Letter**

**a) Sender's Address in a Business Letter**

- *Position in British English:* In British English, the sender's address is usually placed in the top right corner of the letter. (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



- *Position in American English:* In American English the sender's address is usually placed in the top left corner, below the date, or at the end of the letter, below the signature.
- Sender's address below the date: (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



- Sender's address below the signature: (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)

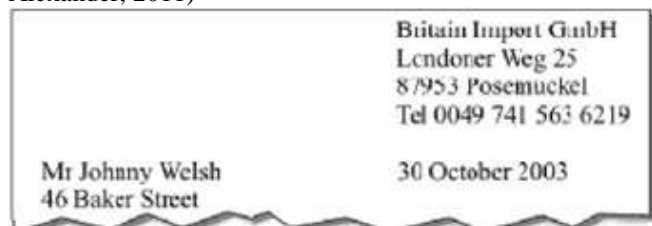


**b) Date in a Business Letter**

*British English*

Write: 30 October 2010

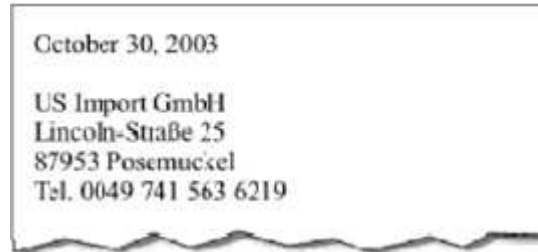
**Position:** on the right, one line below the sender's address (in letters with a ready-printed sender's address, the date can also be put in the top left corner). (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



*American English*

Write: October 30, 2010

**Position:** top left corner (sometimes centered), (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



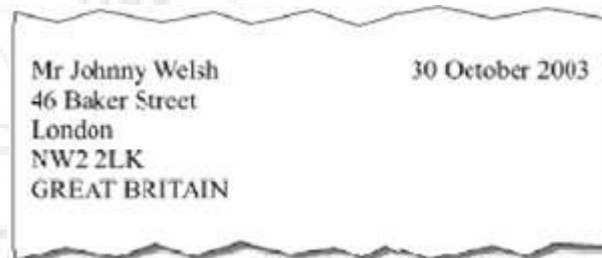
**c) Recipient Address in a Business Letter**

Ms / Miss / Mrs / Mr / Dr ...  
 House number, Street Place  
 Area code  
 COUNTRY (in capital letters)

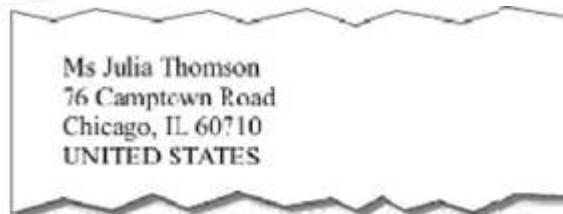
In American English, the area code is usually at the same level as the place, separated by a comma.

**Position:** on the left

*British English:* In British English, the recipient's address starts on the same line as the date or one line below the date. (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



**American English:** In American English, the recipient's address starts two lines below the sender's address (or two lines below the date if the sender's address isn't placed in the top left corner). (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



**d) Salutation in a Business Letter**

**If you know the person's name:**

Dear Ms / Miss / Mrs / Mr / Dr + surname  
 Dear Mr Miller

You can also write the person's full name. In this case, leave out the title (Mr/Mrs). This way of writing the salutation is very handy if you don't know the gender of the person.

Dear Chris Miller

**If you don't know the person's name:**

There are several possibilities to address people that you don't know by name: (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)

Salutation	when to use
Dear Sir / Dear Sirs	male addressee (esp. in British English)
Gentlemen	male addressee (esp. in American English)
Dear Madam	female addressee (esp. in British English)
Ladies	female addressee (esp. in American English)
Dear Sir or Madam	gender unknown (esp. in British English)

Ladies and Gentlemen gender unknown	(esp. in American English)
To whom it may concern gender unknown	(esp. in American English)

Business partners often call each other by their first names. In this case, write the salutation as follows:

Dear Sue

### Punctuation

In British English, don't use any punctuation mark or use a comma.

Dear Mr Miller or Dear Mr Miller,

In American English, use a colon:

Dear Mr. Miller:

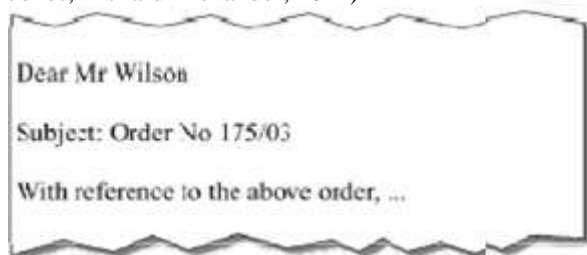
### Subject Line in a Business Letter

A subject line is not really necessary. You may want to use one, however, so that the reader immediately knows what your letter is about. There are three common methods to distinguish the subject line from the body of the letter:

- Use "Subject:" or "Re:"
- Type the subject in bold letters
- Type the subject in capital letters

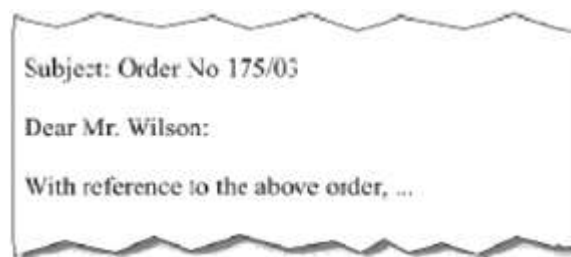
### British English

The subject line is usually placed between the salutation and the body of the letter (with a blank line in between). (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



### American English

In American English, the subject line can also be placed between the recipient's address and the salutation (with a blank line in between). (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)



### e) Body of a Business Letter

Capitalize the first word of the text (even if the salutation ends with a comma). The text is left-justified and a blank line is put after each paragraph. It is not common to indent the first line of a paragraph.

**Content** (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)

- First paragraph: introduction and reason for writing
- Following paragraphs: explain your reasons for writing in more detail, provide background information etc.
- Last paragraph: summarize your reason for writing again and make clear what you want the recipient to do

**Note:** Your text should be positive and well structured.

### f) Greeting in a Business Letter

#### British English

If you used the recipient's name in the salutation, use 'sincerely'.

If you did not use the recipient's name in the salutation, use 'faithfully'.

#### American English

Use 'sincerely', no matter if you used the recipient's name in the salutation or not ('faithfully' is not common in American English).

### g) Salutation - Greeting

*British English* (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)

Salutation	Greeting
Dear MsWexley	Yours sincerely / Sincerely yours
Dear Jane Wexley	
Dear Jane	
Dear Sir	Yours faithfully / Faithfully yours

Dear Sirs

Dear Madam

Dear Sir or Madam

*American English* (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)

Salutation	Greeting
Dear Ms. Wexley:	Sincerely, / Sincerely yours,
Dear Jane Wexley:	
Dear Jane:	
Gentlemen:	Sincerely, / Sincerely yours,
Ladies:	
Ladies and Gentlemen:	
To whom it may concern:	

In emails you could also write:

- Regards
- Kind regards
- Best wishes

[11] Braj Kachru in "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle" (1985).

**h) Enclosures in Business Letter (Leo Jones, Richard Alexander, 2011)**

If you wish to enclose documents, you can either list all enclosed documents separately or just write the word 'Enclosure' below the signature.



### 3. Conclusion

The strict rules of grammar are in such cases sometimes ignored, when, for example, a stressed negotiator's only goal is to reach an agreement as quickly as possible. By linguist Braj Kachru's theory of the "expanding circle", Kachru conceived the idea of three concentric circles of the language. He said inner circle (UK, US, etc.) is 'norm-providing'. That means that English language norms are developed in these countries – English is the first language there. The outer circle (mainly New Commonwealth countries) is 'norm-developing'. The expanding circle (much of the rest of the world) is 'norm-dependent', because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle. (Kachru, 1985)

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